

Devil Days

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Summary: The story of an orphan boy who survives the streets to become Prince of Thieves Guild

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> <div class="center"><h2>DEVIL DAYS<h2>**

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Chapter One

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> No matter how high the temperature soared today, the little boy knew he had to find a target and quick. It had already been three days since he last ate, and in his weaken condition he knew he didn't have the strength to keep running from the bullies on the street.

>

> Pushing the huge sunglasses up over the ridge of his nose, he suddenly caught a view of the cafe across the street. He knew people with a lot of money in their pockets visited the restaurant often. The cafe would be the perfect place to find the patsy he needed so desperately.

>

> Standing in the shadows, he watched and waited until he saw a tall

man appear, took a seat and then ordered a drink. The boy watched, amazed at how quickly the man's order was completed. He knew the man must be someone special to have the café's staff serving the man so quickly.

>

> For several minutes the boy continued to watch the man, waiting for the perfect time to strike. The man's back was facing him, taking his time to enjoy the drink he had ordered. Realizing the time was right, the boy ran across the street and sneaked up behind the man. A waiter, his back also to the little boy was handling the man his bill.

>

> "New Orleans is a beautiful city, too bad I have to go back to Montana in three months, the winters up there are horrible." The waiter said as he waited to be paid. "Was everything just as you like it, Jean-Luc?"

>

> "Oui!" Jean-Luc got to his feet, turned and noticed the little boy. His eyes widened, surprised to see the child standing beside him. "Y' lost, petite?"

>

> "Non," The little boy shook his head, wishing he had chosen another patsy instead of this one. The man was a lot taller and menacing than he was sitting down. The boy took a deep breath and held up the man's wallet that he had just stolen and offered it back to his intended victim. "Y' dropped dis, M'sieu."

>

> "Merci beau coup," The man took the wallet and started looking through it. The little boy slowly started backing away, realizing he was about to be discovered.

>

> Finding his money missing, the man's head snapped up. He rapidly reached out and grabbed the boy by the arm. The unexpected action caused the boy to lose his balance, and Jean-Luc only had a split second to catch the boy before he fell to the ground. He gently steadied the boy but not before knocking the sunglasses off the child's face. He gasped in shock at the boy's strange eyes. They were red on black. "Mon Dieu!"

>

> "Let me go!" The boy screamed, trying to pull his arm free. LeBeau released the boy and allowed him to run.

>

> "Mutant brat," The waiter watched the boy runs out of view. "Those streets urchins will steal you blind if you are not careful." He nodded in the direction the boy had disappeared. "That one is the worst of the bunch, almost caught him last week but the little freak was too fast, the devil's spawn is what he is."

>

> "Y' should be' lil' nicer to de petite." Jean-Luc glared at the man before leaving to go after the boy. He stopped, turned and angrily added, "Boy probably hungry, or worse."

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> The boy kept running as fast as his legs could carry him. He dodged in and out of street corners until he felt it was safe enough to stop long enough to catch his breath.

>
> "Y' wan' to give me back my money, petite?"
>
> The boy turned around and got the shock of his life, there standing in front of him was the same man he had just moments ago, left in the dust, or so he had thought. He angrily backed up into the nearby corner. "Non, y' forget 'bout de money, I don' have it anymore."
>
> "Y' spend it already, boy!" Jean-Luc approached
>
> The boy moved into the shadows of the building, knowing his eyes would start glowing in the darkness and give his location away. He needed the sunglasses and they were no where to be found. It would only be seconds before the man would start calling him names or worse, yell for some authority figure.
>
> As he backed against the wall, the boy took a deep breath and waited for the inevitable to happen, but something strange happened. The man didn't appear to be afraid or threatened by his weird eyes. This was something new to the boy and it worried him. Everyone hated his eyes, why was this man different. What did he want?
>
> "Y' don' have to fear Jean-Luc, petite. I'm not goin' to harm y'."

>
> "Heard it b'fore, M'sieu," The boy barely whispered, panting from the run he had just completed. He knew if he had any hope of escaping he had to talk, hoping it would distract the man long enough to drop his guard. "Dey talk nice to y' an' den dey beat y' up for takin' dere money an' den dey call de cops."
>
> "Den y' an' me make a deal, non?" Jean-Luc glanced around the alley and found a wooden crate. He kept his eye on the boy while he grabbed the box, dropped it down at his feet and sat down on it to keep the boy trapped in the corner. "I won' tell de police if y' come home wit' me."
>
> "Heard 'bout dem types too, an' I don' go to strange people's houses," The boy watched the man carefully looking for an opening to escape. "Y' one of dem types, M'sieu?"
>
> "Bet y' don' trust anybody do y' petite!"
>
> "Don' need dem." The boy angrily answered. He didn't like anyone prying into his life, especially nosey rich men. They were trouble. He knew he had to escape before this man got his hands on him. "Y' best leave b'fore my friends show up an' teach y' a lesson 'bout followin' lil' boys." Hearing something, he glanced up and his heart dropped into his stomach. A police officer was standing at the other end of the alley. Things couldn't have gotten worse.
>
> The boy wasn't the only one who knew they had a visitor, Jean-Luc got to his feet and started walking out of the alley. "Mebbe I go an' talk to dis police officer an' see what he got to say."
>
> The boy swallowed the lump in his throat, terrified of what would happen to him if he was turned over to the police. He yelled at Jean-Luc's retreating back, "Wait, M'sieu!"
>
> "Oui?" Jean-Luc turned.

>
> The boy came out of the shadows. His hand quickly covered his brow as the sun hit him in the face. He tried to shield his eyes from the pain and the blinding light. He felt something tap his arm, "Y' left dese back at de cafe."
>
> The boy looked down at the sunglasses that were being offered to him. He took them and put them back on his face. "Merci, M'sieu." His eyes adjusted quickly and then reality hit him. He had to choose between obeying this man or going with the police. He sighed in defeat. "Don' call de cops, dey will send me to an orphanage an' dey do bad t'ings to y' dere."
>
> "Y' come home wit' me?"
>
> The boy glanced once at the officer and then back at the man. He lowered his head down to the ground and shook it, trying hard not to cry. What was going to happen to him now?
>
> "Y' got no reason to be scared of me, boy," Jean-Luc placed a hand on the boy's shoulders. The boy was so frightened that he started shaking. The man must have known he was scared. "I give y' my word dat not'ing is goin' to happen to y'." He stooped down to the boy's eye level. "What's your name, petite?"
>
> The boy only shrugged, but continued to keep his head bowed. He couldn't answer the man because he didn't know the answer either.
>
> "Well boy, we will t'ink of somet'ing to call y' later, huh," Jean-Luc pulled the boy tenderly out of the alley. As they passed the officer, Jean-Luc gave the officer a nod and then the two walked out into the streets together. "Bet y' hungry."
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> > <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER TWO<h3>*>
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> Opening the door to the large house, Jean-Luc stepped inside. "Coming petite?" He asked, holding the door open for the boy to enter. "I'm gave y' my word boy, nothin' is goin' to happen to y'."
>
> The boy slowly stuck his head inside the doorway just enough to see if anyone or thing was waiting to jump him. Feeling safe for the moment, he entered but made sure the owner of the house stayed in front of him. He wanted to make sure his escape route was not cut off just in case this man really wanting to hurt him.
>
> Once inside the home, the boy quickly looked around the huge living room.
>
> A large fire place stood at the far wall with several photographs in gold picture frames on the mantle. Several small trinkets, layered in silver and gold were sitting on several tables with many other valuables laying around.
>

> "If y' need to wash up, dere's one upstairs, second door on de left, and anoter one is down de hall." Jean-Luc walked towards a small room next to the living room. "I'll b' in de study if y' need me. I've got some business to tend to b'fore I do anyt'ing else. Make y'self at home, petite."

>

> "Who else lives here sides y'?" The boy asked, watching his host's every movement.

>

> "Henri, Therese, mon ward and Tante Mattie, y' be meetin' dem soon enough." Jean-Luc answered him.

>

> "Who's Henri?"

>

> "Mon fils, he should b' here in 'bout an hour." He replied before going into the study.

>

> The boy decided now was as good a time to do some exploring. As he looked around the living room, he quickly and quietly started tying the bottom of his over size shirt into a knot. He kept watching the study door while he took several trinkets and stuffed them down his shirt.

>

> Running into the bathroom, he looked up at the window and lowered his arms, disappointedly. He realized the window was too small for him to crawl out of and escape with his new found treasures. Turning back around, he quickly ran towards the front door. Before he could touch the knob, the door was opened and a huge tall man with a bushy mustache walked into the house and grabbed him.

>

> "Let me go."

>

> "Who are y', boy?" The man tightened his hold on the boy and lifted him up. "An' what y' b' doin' in dis house?"

>

> The door to the study room opened and Jean-Luc came out to investigate the boy's cries. He instantly took a quick look and noticed several items were missing. LeBeau glanced at the boy, his eyes narrowed and a slight smile appeared on his face. He knew exactly where those items were, and who had taken them. "Henri, let de boy down." He said. "He's a guest in our home."

>

> Henri lowered the boy back to his feet and walked over to Jean-Luc. "PÃ're, why y' brin' dis petite home?" He lowered his voice. "Dis not like y' to bring strangers into our house."

>

> "Trust yer PÃ're, Henri, Have I ever been wron' b'fore, no?" Jean-Luc watched the boy carefully, knowing the child could hear him. "De boy has potential. If given de right up bringin' he could b' a legend in de guild."

>

> A knock on the front door broke up their private meeting, a woman entered the home carrying two bags of groceries. "Jean, didn' t'ink y' an' Henri both b' home at dis hour." She suddenly noticed the small boy sitting on the sofa. "An' who might dis one b'?" She turned to Jean. "Is de chile stayin' for dinner?"

>

> "Non, he's leavin'," Henri replied.

>

> "He's stayin' Tante." Jean-Luc answered, giving his son a quick

glance. Henri gave him an angry scowl, but remained silent. The elder LeBeau turned to the boy, who was staring at Tante Mattie putting the groceries up in the kitchen. "Petite, would y' like somet'ing to eat?"

>

> "Oui, merci beaucoup, M'sieu LeBeau." The boy smiled, getting to his feet he rushed to the kitchen. "M'dam Tante, can I help y'?"

>

> "Sure chile," Tante glanced down at the boy, giving him a smile of her own. She waved him closer. "Y' can help me fix de gumbo, would y' like dat?"

>

> "Oui," The boy rushed over and started to help with the preparation of dinner. An hour later, Tante began to sit the dishes down on the table when she noticed the boy was opening the lid getting ready to dip the ladle spoon into the large black kettle. "Wait chile, it's too hot for y' right now."

>

> The boy ignored her warning, he lowered the spoon, filling it with the thick stew and placed it in his mouth. He quickly realized his mistake. The spoon dropped out of his hand and he cried out in pain.

>

> "Y' be a stubborn one, aren' y' chile?" She quickly picked him up, placed him on the table and gave him a glass of water. "Drink dis down real slow an' don' argue wit' me."

>

> The boy obeyed, thankful for the assistance. As soon as his tongue stopped burning, he gave the glass back to Tante. "Merci."

>

> During dinner, Jean-Luc, Henri and Tante Mattie talked among themselves while the boy ate three bowls of gumbo. He had no idea what the three were talking about, he really didn't care, his only concern was eating as much of the gumbo as he possible could.

>

> "Y' must have been starvin', chile." Tante swiped the boy's hair out of his eyes. "Y' need to call yer folks an' let dem know where y' be."

>

> "Don' have anybody," The boy managed to answer between shoveling the food into his mouth. "I take care of m'self."

>

> "Y' need a family, chile." Tante continued to play with his hair. "Mebbe Tante will take y' in an raise y' proper." She glanced over at the two men, who were both talking among themselves. She raised her voice to get their attention. "Jean, it's gettin' late, is de chile stayin' de night?"

>

> "If de boy wants to stay, he can."

>

> "Non, y' been nice enough," The boy got to his feet, wiped his mouth with his napkin and started for the door. He rubbed his stomach, making the others think he was thankful for the meal and full, instead he was making sure the items he had stolen were still inside the shirt.

>

> "Petite, y' got no business bein' on de streets at dis hour." Henri spoke up, surprising the boy with his change of attitude. Only hours earlier, Henri didn't want the small visitor staying. The younger LeBeau walked over to the boy and gently guided him back towards the

table. "Y' stay 'ere wit' us."

>

> The boy looked at all three people in the room and nodded slightly. He would try to find a way to escape with his treasure later tonight. "Merci beaucoup, but just for de night."

>

> "Bien," Jean-Luc said, turned towards the healer. "Tante, would y' show de boy where he will b' sleepin'?"

>

> "Come with me, chile." Tante led the boy upstairs to a large bedroom. She turned on the light and allowed the boy to see the room for himself.

>

> "Y' get settled while I go run y' a bath."

>

> "Bath! non, no bath."

>

> "Oui chile," Tante opened several of the drawers looking for clothes, while the boy took his shirt off and carefully made sure his trinkets were still inside. He tossed the shirt under the bed to hide until he could retrieve them later when it was safe to leave. Tante pulled out a long t-shirt and held it up to the boy to measure. "Goin' to be way too long for y' but at least it is somethin' to wear. Now it's time for yer bath."

>

> At hearing her last words, the boy tried to run out of the room, only to have Tante catch him. "Y' are goin' to take a bath or I'll give y' one myself."

>

> "Dis not fair," The boy screamed in protest after he gave up struggling. It was useless once Tante had grabbed him. "M'sieu LeBeau didn' say not'in' 'bout no bath."

>

> "Well chile, y' best settle down right now, b'cause yer gettin' a bath." Tante turned the boy around to face her. "Now y' best march yer'self down de hall an' into de bathroom, or y' be findin' out real fast how hard my hand feels across yer bottom."

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> <p> Downstairs Henri and Jean-Luc were laughing, they could hear what was going on upstairs. "Tante is enjoyin' herself, non?" Henri heard several loud slaps across bare skin. "I t'ink she misses playin' mere." <p>

>

> "Oui, it good to have a petite in de house again, Henri." Jean-Luc added, before drinking a cup of coffee and listening to the sounds upstairs. It had been a long time since his house felt like a home.

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> <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER THREE<h3>**

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> Early the next morning, Therese came into the guest bedroom the find Jean-Luc sitting in a lazy boy chair rocking the small boy, who laid asleep in his arms. He glanced up to greet her, "Why y' up dis early in de mornin', Therese?" He asked, whispering to the young red headed woman so not to wake the child in his arms. "It's not even daylight an' yet y' already cleanin' de house."

>
> "Got a lot to do today, Uncle Jean and with only three more weeks left before I go back to Washington to finish my schooling, I want to see as much of New Orleans as I can." Therese looked down at the child, sleeping in her uncle's arms and whispered. "Do you want me to put the boy back in the bed?"

>
> "Non, de boy is fine where he is," Jean-Luc continued to rock in the chair. He managed to pull the blanket up a little closer to cover the boy completely. "De chile woke up screamin' from a night mare several hours ago, took me an' Henri both to calm him down b'fore he fell back to sleep."

>
> "There's no telling what things have been done to this little one," She stooped down and softly touched the little boy's hair. "You wouldn't believe the horrible stories I've heard about what happens to these kids, and this one is so young to be placed in that kind of environment."

>
> "Henri's been tellin' me dem stories most of de night." He slowly got to his feet and carried the boy back to the bed and covered him with the sheets and blankets. He then waved Therese out of the room, and closed the door behind them. The two walked down the stairs, "Y' best start down here so not to wake de boy. Tante should be here soon. Tell her to keep de boy here as long as he wants to stay."

>
> "When should I tell Tante Mattie when you are returning?"

>
> "Late tonight. I wish I didn' have to go but dere's business wit' de guild on anot'er matter dat's more important at de moment." His voice trailed off as he glanced back upstairs. "Tell Henri, to cancel his plans for de next few weeks an' invite a few very close friends over." Jean-Luc noticed her confused look, he quickly added, "Therese, mon fils will know what I mean just make sure y' deliver dis message to Henri, caprice?"

>
> "He will get the message and should I tell Tante Mattie as well?"

>
> "Oui!" He answered before leaving.

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> <p> Several hours later, the little boy opened his eyes and looked around his surroundings. He jerked up in bed, remembering where he was and where he had hidden his stash. Quickly getting out of bed, he reached under the bed, pulled out the shirt and the merchandise he had stolen. He put the shirt back on and placed his stash inside the shirt. <p>
>
> He opened the door and looked both ways down the long hall, seeing

nothing or anyone, he took off for the stairs. Before he could take three steps down the stairs, a wonderful aroma caught his senses. He followed the smell downstairs and into the kitchen.

>

> "Y' ready for breakfast, chile?" Tante Mattie greeted him at the doorway entrance with the same smile the boy loved so well. It was Tante's kindness and smile that the boy took an immediate liking to. He couldn't explain it but he liked the entire LeBeau household.

>

> "Oui!" The boy answered and ran to the table. As he watched her cook, he worked up the courage to strike up a conversation. "Where's M'sier LeBeau?"

>

> "In town." Tante added several spices in with the eggs. Pulling down two plates from the cabinet, she walked over to the table and placed them down on the table, one in front of the boy and the other one directly across the table from him.

>

> "Y' tell me 'bout M'sier LeBeau, non?" The boy flashed her a huge grin.

>

> "Chile, y' tryin' to con Tante?" Tante lifted the iron skillet from the stove and carried it over to the table and filled both plates with the eggs. "With a smile like dat one, y' gonna be breakin' a lot of hearts when y' grow up." She returned to the kitchen and got another skillet, this one had bacon. She put the meat on the plates. "Jean-Luc is a very kind and honorable man an' dat's just de beginnin'." She sat down at the table and tossed some salt over her eggs. "Tell y' what, y' ask Jean-Luc y'self all dese questions if y' want to know more."

>

> "Non, just wanna t'ank M'sier LeBeau for his hospitality, but I got to be goin'."

>

> "Y' goin' to eat b'fore y' walk out dis door, chile." Tante motioned with her folk for him to eat. She smiled, watching as he obeyed her. "Jean will b' back late tonight. Y' want to stay here an' spend de day with Tante?"

>

> "Non, mais, merci beau coup."

>

> "Y' more dan welcome to come back again." Tante let him out of the house and watched as he ran off down the street. Sighing deeply, she shook her head. She knew the little boy had managed to touch everyone's heart in the house, but the problem facing everyone was getting the boy to open up to them. Trust, she knew did not come easy for him. He had been hurt deeply and what ever had scared him in his sleep last night was still out there waiting for him in the streets.

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> In town, the boy was searching for his hiding place to add his new treasure to his other collections. The streets were unusually quiet for a Sunday morning. Maybe if he were lucky, he wouldn't see his tormenters today.

>

> Turning a street corner, he realized his wish just turned into a nightmare.

>

> "Well, well, well, look who we have here, boys." The leader of the group spoke up, laughing as he walked in front of the boy. "Whatcha got in your shirt, devil boy?"

>

> "Yeah brat, you think you can escape us?" The second teenager replied before grabbing one of the trinkets out of the boy's shirt and then examined it. "Hey Jarod, he's been holding out on us again."

>

> "Give me that, Paul." Jarod, the leader, grabbed the item from the second boy and held the trinket in front of the boy. "I thought that last beating I gave you smarten you up some." He threw the trinket down on the ground and stepped on it. "I can see you need to be punished for not listening to me." He started beating his fist into his other opened palm. "And this time you will not be so lucky." Turning to his two companions, he ordered. "Paul, you and Wayne hold him good. He screams just once, cut him and give him a reason to scream."

>

> The boy ducked in between Jarod's legs, grabbed the broken trinket and took off running. He turned around and laughed. "Y' be not'in' but idiots, y' couldn't catch me even if I let y' try."

>

> He ran down the streets as fast as his legs could carry him. He dodged down several streets, knocking over several people who had the misfortune to get in his way. Hearing, but not paying attention to the curse words they yelled at him, he still ran until he found his hideout, an old abandon shack.

>

> Opening and closing the door behind him, he quickly put the old rusty office chair next to the door knob to keep anyone out that might hurt him. Catching his breath, he slowly laid down on the dirty mattress he used as his bed.

>

> He waited for several minutes until he calmed down and felt safe enough to move around. He pulled out all the things that was in his shirt, including the broken trinket. A slight noise caught his attention, a huge rat crawled across the floor moving towards him. He picked up a rock from the pile he kept by his bed and threw it at the rat, making it disappear into the darkest part of the shack. Remembering all the warm food and clothes the people from the huge house had given him was making him regret stealing from them in the first place. He got back to his feet and quickly stuffed the trinkets back down his shirt. He waited until darkness fell before he left the safety of his shack.

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> Around eleven the same night, the door bell sounded. Opening the door, Henri LeBeau glanced down at his visitor. "'ello petite, we were hopin' y' come back. Y' want to come inside?"

>

> "Is M'sier LeBeau home?" The boy asked nervously, figuring the LeBeau's knew the items were missing and he had been the one who took

them. It wouldn't surprise him to find the police inside waiting on him. He didn't care, even if they didn't believe him, he would have the satisfaction of trying to make things right with the people who had been so kind to him.

>
> "Oui, just wait in de livin' room," Henri grabbed a set of keys off the table. "I got an errand to attend, y' can wait for Pere in dere if y' want."

>
> "Merci," The boy walked into the living room. Hearing the door slam behind him, he quickly looked around to see if anyone was watching him. Satisfied the coast was clear, he quickly put back the things he had stolen the night before.

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> Unknown to him, the owner of the house stood in the shadows watching his every move. The boy finished and moved to the couch. A few minutes later, Jean-Luc entered the room.

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> <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER FOUR<h3>**

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> As the boy sat nervously on the end of the couch waiting for someone to come, he started to swing his legs back and forth. He was so deep in thought that he didn't notice a figure entering the room.

>

> "'ello petite."

>

> The man's voice startled the boy so badly that he jumped clear onto the couch and retreated as far as he could into it. He had to wait until his heart beat stopped pounding in his ears before he could speak. "M'sier LeBeau, I got not'in' better to do, does your offer still stand?"

>

> "Oui, boy," Jean-Luc moved to the couch and sat down carefully so not to scare the boy, who retreated to the furthest end of the couch. He picked up one of the trinkets from the nearby table and examined it. He held it up for the boy to see. "Y' brought dese back, merci."

>

> "Y' knew I took dem yesterday an' y' let me come back?" The boy asked before another thought entered his mind. His face reflected that thought as his voice started to quiver. "Y' goin' to call de cops, aren' y!"

>

> "Non," LeBeau answered, putting the boy's mind at ease. "I just needed to know if I could trust y' boy." The boy moved out of Jean-Luc's reach when the man tried to touch him. He still didn't know if he should trust the man. It seemed LeBeau knew what he was

thinking. "Do y' t'ink I would allow y' to stay 'ere in my home if I didn' t'ink I could trust y'?"

>

> "De last one who said dat to me tried to," The boy's voice started to quiver again as the memory of what happened the last time he thought he had a new friend. It was too much pain involved in that incident to comprehend. Tears started to form in his eyes. He couldn't take it anymore, he had to get away before he started to cry. He ran for the door.

>

> Jean-Luc jumped to his feet, quickly grabbing the boy before he could reach the door. The second LeBeau's arms engulfed the him, he started screaming. He barely heard Jean-Luc's words, trying to sooth him. "Easy petite, nobody is goin' to hurt y'"

>

> "Don' touch me," The boy screamed hysterical. It was his worst nightmare coming to true, again. He kicked his legs and tried to swing his arms trying to hit anything but air. He squirmed and twisted to free himself. Finding himself hopelessly caught, he started begging. "don' hurt me, please, don' hurt me."

>

> "Nobody is goin' to hurt y' chile." Jean-Luc soothed, softly patting the boy's back until the sobs quieted to a few whimpers. "Who has hurt y' dis bad, boy?"

>

> "Y' one of dem aren' y'?" The boy managed to say before breaking down again.

>

> "One of who, boy?"

>

> "Let me have de chile, Jean." Tante's voice broke through the boy's fears, he instantly calmed after she took him in her arms and carried him to one chairs. As she rocked him, the boy rested his head against her chest enjoying the comfort of her loving embrace.

>

> He looked up at her, inhaled her scent and realized for the first time in his life, he loved someone. Tante caressed the side of his face and softly started singing a lullaby the boy found amazing peaceful. He didn't understand but he felt safe in her arms. Within seconds, he slowly began to relaxed.

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> It took two hours before the boy fell asleep but Tante didn't mind. In fact, she enjoyed rocking the little boy in her arms. Feeling he had been asleep long enough not to wake when she took him upstairs, she cautiously got to her feet and carried him upstairs to the guest bedroom he had slept in the night before.

>

> Tante gently put him in the queen size bed and covered him up before leaving the room, making sure the door was left slightly open. Walking downstairs, she angrily crossed her arms to keep her temper in check. "Someone out dere is scarin' dat chile to death an' whoever it is must still be after 'em."

>

> "Oui, de boy tries to act brave, but it's just a front. De petite has been hurt too many times to trust anyone. He t'inks everyone

wants somet'in' if dey try to be nice to 'em." Jean-Luc sat down in the rocker closest to the door, "De boy seems to feel relaxed around y', Tante, mebbe y' can get 'em to open up for us."

>

> "Jean, dere's somethin' dat I want to discuss wit' you." Tante moved to the other rocking chair, sat down and looked at him. She never took her eyes off him as she spoke, "A bunch o' us been talkin'. Someone's been stealin' several of de street children an' de only reason nothin' bein' done is b'cause it's de mutant children dat's bein' taken."

>

> "Us, as in who, Tante?" Jean-Luc eyed her suspiciously.

>

> "De Assassins an' de Thieves, all o' us!" Tante angrily answered. She blinked in disbelief, shocked by her hostility towards her friend. She had never raised her voice to the leader of the Thieves Guild. Tante quickly apologized, but she still remained just as angry. It was no secret when someone or thing threatened or harmed a child, she became defensive.

>

> Tante believed herself the guardian angel of those who couldn't defend themselves and the small one upstairs was quickly becoming her favorite. "I may be a nurse maid to you an' de rest o' de guild, Jean, but even de lil' ones on de street need lookin' after."

>

> "Easy Tante," Jean-Luc approached, placing a hand on her shoulder. "After last night, I told Henri to gather a few o' de boys an' see what's goin' on out dere on de streets." He looked back up towards the stairs, seemingly glaring a hole into the balcony wall. "An' if dat person's found, he better pray de assassins get him first b'fore I get my hands on 'em."

>

> "You don' fool ol' Tante, Jean." Tante couldn't stop the grin from getting bigger across her face. Jean-Luc LeBeau kept the local and federal authorities at bay with his mysterious ways but she knew him like a book. She jumped to her feet and gave the Guild leader a hug. "Dat boy has stolen yer heart, hasn' he?"

>

> "Oui, dat he has," He admitted, returning her grin. "I say de boy has stolen de whole house hold as well, yours included, neh Tante?" He began to climb the stairs. "Bonsoir, Tante!"

>

> "Bonsoir, Jean."

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> Looking at the newspaper early the next morning, Jean-Luc heard movement coming from upstairs. Glancing at the clock on the fireplace mantle, which displayed 7a.m., he figured Therese was getting up. The girl was always working, believing she needed to repay him for her education. Arguing with his ward was almost as futile as disagreeing with Tante, he'd never won an argument with the woman and he'd doubt he ever would.

>

> Looking around the place, he had to admit the place was cluttered after last night's late meeting. He heaved a deep frustrated sigh, he didn't sleep well last night. His thoughts kept wondering between

worrying over the boy and his own desire of punishing those who were responsible for harming the boy. It had become his number one prerogative.

>

> Glancing up towards the stairs, he was about to greet Therese, but when he saw the boy coming downstairs, he was a little surprised.

"Bon Matin, petite, y' sleep well?"

>

> "Oui, M'sieu LeBeau." The boy stepped down from the bottom step and slowly made his way to the large room.

>

> "Sit down boy and let's y' an' me talk, non."

>

> The boy took a seat on the huge couch, "What y' wanna talk 'bout, M'sieu LeBeau?"

>

> "Maybe it's time we get to know each ot'er a lil' better," Jean-Luc put the newspaper down on the ottoman, his attention turned to the boy watching him. "Would y' like to spend de day hangin' around de house an' y' an' I can keep each ot'er company? How does dat sound to y', petite?"

>

> "I'm sorry dat I freaked out on y' last night," The boy's apologized, his voice barely above a whisper. It was clear to LeBeau the boy was embarrassed about the incident and was having trouble accepting it. "Didn' mean to be any burden to y' or your family."

>

> "Y' don' need to be apologizing f' anyt'ing, chile." Jean-Luc approached the boy. Sitting down beside him, Jean-Luc made sure he didn't startle his guest. He slowly placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Y' need to know dat y' can consider dis your home as much as we do."

>

> "Quoi?"

>

> "Y' heard me, boy." The man laughed at the boy's shocked expression. "Dis is your home as long as y' want it to be." Before the boy could respond, Jean-Luc waved his hand in front of his face. "Non! B'fore y' ask, dere's no catch. Y' can come an' go as y' please."

>

> "Y' know I be a mutant, non?" The boy looked up, almost dreading the response he was about to get. He had heard all kinds of remarks about his eyes, and he knows this man's words would be no different than the ones he had heard before. Nobody cared for mutants, especially mutant homeless children.

>

> "I wouldn' care if y' had green skin an' a long pointed tail."

>

> "Dey call me Devil Boy on de streets," The boy stated. "Mebbe I grow a tail when I get older, nuh?"

>

> "Mebbe I play football for de Saints, non?" Jean-Luc laughed. The boy smiled at his joke. "Y' see petite, it makes no difference to me what y' are. I just know I want y' to stay an' so does de rest of de family. Do we have a deal?"

>

> "Why y' care 'bout me, M'sieu LeBeau?" The boy asked him, tears forming in his eyes. He wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt. "I'm not 'in' but street trash, nobody ever cared if I lived or died

just as long as I got outta dere way."

>

> "Can y' except de fact for once in your life dat someone really cares, petite?" He run his fingers through the boy's matted hair. "I know no one has ever given y' a reason to believe in dem, to believe in anyt'ing, All dat's been given to y' is mistrust, hurt and cruelty." He reached down and gently touched the boy's chin, lifting it. "Just give me a chance, dat's all I ask, chile. Give me dat one chance an' I promise y' dat I will not throw it back in your face."

>

> The boy's hope of keeping control over his emotions, like everything else in his life failed. Tears fell down his face as he tried desperately to keep his eyes closed to stop them. Without realizing it, he started crying. All the years of being treated like yesterday's garbage finally caught up with him mentally. He doesn't fight when he was lifted into the man's chest and hugged tightly. .

>

> "I promise y' dat not'in' is ever goin' to hurt y' again." Jean-Luc held him tight as the boy continued to cry uncontrollably. "I am 'ere as long as y' need me." He moved to the rocking chair and rocked the boy. A method he and Tante both realized how well it seemed to eased the boy. He glanced up and saw Therese smiling at him.

>

> The door bell chimed. "I'll get it, Uncle Jean." She moved to the door and opened it. "Hi, you're here early, aren't you? Come on in." Therese greeted the visitor. She turned back to Jean-Luc, "It's for you

>

> Jean-Luc sat the boy back down in the rocker after he got to his feet. "Y' stay dere an' I be back." He walked over to the door and greets his visitor.

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> Ten minutes passed and the boy wondered why Jean-Luc was taking so long to come back. He got out of the chair and walked towards the door. The visitor was carrying on a long conversation with Jean-Luc. It was clear to the boy, what ever the conversation was, it had to be something very important.

>

> Jean-Luc turned, looked down at the boy and gathered him in his arms. "Wait 'ere Jacques, I want to talk to de boy first."

>

> "Oui, Jean-Luc," The man named Jacques Benoit answered.

>

> Walking back to the lazy boy rocker, Jean-Luc sat down and placed the boy in his lap. "Sorry petite, but I got some important business to attend an' it can' wait. Y' want to stay 'ere wit' Therese until I get back, non?"

>

> The boy nodded, looked at the man standing by the door. He wanted to ask Jean-Luc who he was and what he wanted but he thought better of it after noticing the concern look on Jean-Luc's face. "I be fine."

>

> "I'll be back as soon as I can. Tante will be 'ere as soon as she finishes her errands." The boy smiled at the news and it didn't go unnoticed by LeBeau. "Oh, y' like Tante?"

>

> "Oui!" The boy climbed down out of LeBeau's lap, but his smile never faded. He rushed to Therese's side, offering to make himself useful. "Y' need for me to help y' T'erease?"

>

> "This must be my lucky day, a cute little boy to help me." Therese replied, taking his hand and leading him down the hallway. "We can start down here and by the time we're finished, You can help me, Tante should be home to make you some breakfast."

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> <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER FIVE<h3>**

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> The boy spent most of the next hour helping Therese clean the house. "Y' de only one who cleans dis place?" He asked, sweeping the kitchen floor. "Dis place too big for just y."

>

> "You haven't met the maid." She said. "I'm only helping out until she returns. Her name's Monica and she's on vacation for the next two weeks."

>

> "So y' jus' replacin' de one on vacation?"

>

> "Yes, sort of I guess," Therese laughed, washing the last of the dishes. The boy gave her a confused look, not understanding the situation. She laughed harder, "You don't understand, Jean-Luc pays for my schooling up north, in return I help out around here a few weeks during the summer." She placed the dish cloth on the sink counter, turned and took the broom from his hands and tapped his nose playfully. "Uncle Jean is one of the nicest men I know. He and my father were very good friends and as long as I could remember, I've always called him, Uncle Jean. When my parents were killed in a car crash eight years ago, he had the courts make me his ward and Henri and I grew up together as brother and sister."

>

> "Therese, is dat you in the Kitchen?" Tante's voice called from the hallway.

>

> "Yes, Tante." Therese answered, leaving the kitchen and moving down the hallway and into the living room. The boy followed after her, thrilled to know Tante was home.

>

> "Chile, I'm shocked to see you outta bed dis early in the mornin'." Tante handed her packages over to Therese, who took them upstairs. "Y' couldn't have sleep any wit' all dose nightmares y' kept havin' last night." She motioned for him to follow her to the couch. After sitting down, she pulled the boy up and unto her lap. "Y' want to talk to Tante about yer nightmares?"

>

> "Nightmares?" The boy asked, trying to sound confused. He knew what she was talking about but he didn't want to talk about it. He climbed

out of her lap and shrugged before lowering his head on her lap in order not to look into her eyes. He was afraid if he did, she would know he was lying.

>

> "Yes, chile." Tante played with his hair. "Y' woke up screaming Rouge Barbe in yer sleep not once but three times, who is dis Rouge Barbe?"

>

> The boy shivered at the sound of the name, if she knew about that man she would have been scared too. Tante pulled him into her lap, trying to hold him. Instead of forcing the issue, Tante started humming a song. He waited until she was finished, before he looked up at her, flashing a huge grin hoping it would convince her. "Rouge Barbe? I don' know a Rouge Barbe, Tante."

>

> "An' I say you be tellin' ol' Tante a big one, huh!" She laughed. "Okay, I won' ask de question again, until y' b' ready to tell me, non. Would y' like to go to town and' do some shoppin' wit' me?"

>

> "But I promised M'sieu LeBeau dat I wait here for him until he gets back."

>

> "No, Jean-Luc wants me to buy you some clothes. Those old clothes of Henri's are jus' way too big for you." Tante explained, "But first Tante's goin' to fix y' some breakfast before we go anywhere. Y' tell Tante what y' want to eat."

>

> "Bacon an' eggs!" The boy shouted, he loved the breakfast he had yesterday.

>

> "Land's sake chile, Tante thought y' had your fill of dem yesterday." She shook her head, laughing as went to the kitchen. "As soon as we get finished eatin' we can go an' get y' somethin' decent to wear."

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>

> It was the first time the boy had ever been inside a shopping mall. And if he had his way, it would be the last time he ever went shopping for clothes with Tante. Not only had they visited every clothing store, but she made him try on everything that wasn't nailed down.

>

> "Y' go into dat room and try dese jeans on." Tante gently guided him over to the correct the dressing room and opened the door for him. He walked inside, waited for the door to close. The door slammed shut and just stood there starrin' at the ceiling.

>

> With him cleaned up, the shopping clerks were ooing and ahing over him, making him feel embarrassed and wanting more than ever to disappear. He stripped off his pants and grabbed the first of several pairs of jeans that were piled up waiting for him to try on. This was going to take hours. Just as he slipped one leg into the pants, the door flew open. He gasped in shock. "Tante!!"

>

> "Oh shush chile, y' ain't got nothin' dat I ain't seen b'fore." She walked in, waiting until he got the jeans on and zipped up. The boy

could feel his face turning red as she examined the jeans and pulled at the sit of the pants. "Y' got plenty of room to move around in an' dey seem to fit in all de right places."

>

> Twenty minutes later, the two emerged from the dressing room, the clerk standing by the desk, looked up and smiled. "How many are you buying?"

>

> "We're goin' take all of dem but two." Tante handed the two pairs of jeans she wasn't buying. She carried the remaining pairs to the nearest cash resister. "Alright, next we goin' to buy you some underwear."

>

> That did it, the boy's face turned bright red, positive the whole store just heard her. He took a chance and looked around, hoping nobody was watching. Contented his dignity was still intact, he decided to take control of the situation. "Non, y' just let me buy dose, don' need nobody t' buy dat for me."

>

> "An' how do y' know what size to buy, chile." She placed the hand that wasn't holding her new purchases on her hip. "Now y' can jus' forget about dose notions of yours an' do as Tante tells you." Seizing the boy by the hand Tante pulled him out the store and down the walk way to another store.

>

> "Mon Dieu!" The boy hissed as he was dragged into another dressing room in another clothing store. "How much longer do we gotta spend at dese places."

>

> Tante abruptly twisted him around and slapped his bottom. "Don' y' dare use de Lord's name in vain like dat." She turned him back around to face her. "Chile, if Tante ever hears y' do dat again I'll paddle y' good, do y' understand me?"

>

> "Oui, Tante." The boy lowered his head, unable to look at her. Nobody ever cared for him except the LeBeaus and this woman. The last thing he wanted was for them to be ashamed of him, he quickly apologized. "Navere!"

>

> "I know y'er sorry, Chile," Tante lifted his chin up, forcing him to look at her. "Now dat y' know better we can forget dis happened, non." She swiped the hair out of his eyes. The boy knew he was forgiven. "As soon as we finish de shoppin' would y' like to go get somethin' to eat at a restaurant?"

>

> "Restaurant, I never ate in a restaurant b'fore."

>

> "Den y' got a treat comin' don' you?"

>

> After trying on several more outfits, Tante gathered the clothes and waited until he finished changing back into his own clothes. "Y' ready to go shoe shoppin'?"

>

> "More shoppin'?"

>

> "Oui, more shoppin' and after dat we still have to buy y' some under clothes." Tante laughed loudly as the boy rolled his eyes and looked up at the ceiling. "Y' might as well get use to it chile, y' are stuck wit' me for de day."

>

> Coming out of the dressing room, Tante gave the clothes to the lady. "We be takin' de threer pants. Can y' tell me which direction to your shoe department?"

>

> "Yes 'em," The lady pointed her finger down the isle. "Just go pass the jewelry department, take a left and go around the baby department and you'll see the shoes. You cannot miss it."

>

> "Thank you," Turning her attention back to the boy, Tante held out her hand. "C'mon, chile, y' can stop draggin' your feet right dis minute, y' are gettin' shoes."

>

> "What's wrong wit' de ones I got?" He stuck out his leg and showed her his shoes. "Dey look fine t' me."

>

> "What's wrong wit'," Tante almost repeated his remark before sighing deeply. "Chile, y' got holes in the bottom of your shoes, the toes are stickin' out an' y' say y' don' need shoes."

>

> "Well I don',"

>

> "Do y' want me to pick y' up and carry y'?"

>

> "I'm no baby!"

>

> "After we get y' some shoes, y' can go to what ever store y' want next, does dat make y' feel better?" Tante asked. "Tante thinks dat's your reward for all dis sufferin' y' think y've been put through."

>

> "Really, any store?"

>

> "Dat's what I said." Tante walked into the shoe store and pulled out several boxes of shoes. After thirty minutes and finding three pairs of dress shoes and a pair of Hi-Tops, she finally allowed him to wonder outside the store and into the main area of the mall. She gave him several dollars and pointed to a store. "De candy store's directly across from de store I will be in, once y' finished y' meet me in dere, understand?"

>

> "Oui!"

>

> Tante watched him run towards the candy store, enjoying the excitement the boy was experiencing. Caring for the children of the Thieves Guild was her life and now that all of the council members children were well old enough to care for themselves with the exception of Jacques Benoit's son, Frances, who like the boy, ten years old, was making her feel useful again.

>

> The boy took his time selecting the goodies he wanted. Tante had given him enough money to buy two small bags of candy. He paid for his merchandise and walked out of the store, popping a piece of peppermint in his mouth. He was about to enter the same clothing store Tante was in when he saw one of his nightmares staring straight at him.

>

> "Well, well, well, it looks like Devil boy has gotten up in the world." Jarod came out of the Radio Shack, the same time the boy had left the candy store. Jarod zipped up his jacket, trying to hide what he had stolen. "Come here you little mutie. I'm going to make your wish you were dead." He yelled at his two friends. "Grab him and take

him out behind the mall so nobody will see what we going to do to him."

>

> The boy looked around, horrified to realize the four boys were the only ones standing at the end of the mall. Most of the people were inside the stores shopping or standing around pretending they couldn't see anything. Seeing a stairway leading down, and believing it to be his only means of escape, he ran for it.

>

> "After him," Jarod screamed, taking off after the boy. The boy knew they could out run him and his only hope was to find a hiding place outside. He could hear the three older boys chasing after him.

>

> The boy reached the bottom of the stairs, terrified to find it was a dead end with the exception of a door. He quickly opened it and ran outside, finding himself behind the mall, a place where the grass hadn't been cut in weeks and trash hadn't been picked up as well. He knew instantly he was in trouble.

>

> The door opened and the three came out and the boy turned to face them.

>

> Jarod laughed, looking around before staring at the boy. "You're not as smart as you think you are, are you Mutie?" He took a few steps towards the frighten boy. "Did you think you could get away from me, Devil Boy?"

>

> "I wonder if his eyes will glow brighter if he feels pain?" Wayne picked up a board and gripped it tightly. "Bet ya that the mutie freak doesn't even feel pain like us. I bettcha we beat him good and he wouldn't even bleed."

>

> "Probably doesn't even have a drop of blood in his body, he ain't human!" Paul, the third boy added, eyeing the young boy trying to keep enough distance between them and himself. "My daddy said all muties should be hunted down and killed because they are freaks of nature and if something isn't done soon they will take over the world."

>

> The boy's anger flared. "Y' stupid like your daddy." He picked up a rock and throws it at Paul, who barely got out of it's way.

>

> Noticing the boy was distracted by Paul, Jarod jumped at the boy and grabbed him by the legs causing both to fall to the ground. "I got you now, Devil boy and this time you're not getting away. We're going to teach you a lesson that you won't soon forget."

>

> The boy panicked as the other two teenagers advanced on him. Jarod grabbed his left foot, twisting it, intending to break it. Reaching for the only thing he could get his hands on, a garbage can lid, he hit Jarod upside the head with it. He struck him three more times as hard as he could before the older boy fell, releasing his grip.

>

> Getting to his feet, the boy picked up the garbage can and threw it in the direction of the other boys. Both boys dropped to the ground to keep from getting hit by the flying garbage can. Seeing his chance, the boy ran back to the door. "Y' can' catch me b'cause y' don' have enough brains in your heads t't'ink. Mebbe y' can get a job pickin' up blocks in a daycare center, no!" With those last remarks he ran back up the stairs.

>
> Opening the door to the second level on the mall floor, he searched for Tante. Turning back around to see if the three teens were still chasing him, he ran into Tante.
>
> "Where have y' been, Chile? I was gettin' worried."
>
> "Tante, I saw de pet store over dere," The boy pointed at the pet store before flashing her a big grin. "I didn' t'ink I was gone so long. De doggies were cute an' I had t' pet dem b'fore I left."
>
> "Chile, wit' a grin like dat, Tante don' need fertilizer for her garden."
>
> The boy caught a glimpse of the three teens. They stopped dead in their tracks once the boy's hand was taken by Tante, leading him away from them. He grinned a wide smile and stuck his tongue at them before turning back around, happy to be going home with Tante. He knew as long as he was with her, the three couldn't touch him.
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> <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER SIX<h3>*>
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>
> Dusk, the three teenagers arrived at a large warehouse near the docks. Walking inside they shut the door and locked it. Hearing a noise above them on the catwalk, all three turned their attention to the sound.
>
> "Well," The huge man with a stringy red beard glared down at them. "Where's th' brat?"
>
> "We had him, Mr. McCartney, but he was with some lady in the mall." Wayne defended themselves to their boss. McCartney was notorious for his violent temper and wouldn't hesitate to kill someone than look at them. "She was buying him a lot of things. We couldn't take the chance of grabbing him in front of a bunch of people."
>
> "What kinda idiot do ya take me fer, son?" McCartney walked down the catwalk and met them halfway in the middle of the warehouse. He spit a wad of tobacco down at one of the teen's feet. "Th' boy's a homeless mutie! Ya expect me ta believe somebody would take a freak ta a mall an' buy him somethin'!"
>
> "He's telling you the truth, Red Beard." Jarod butted in. "How Devil Boy got some lady to buy him that junk we don't know."
>
> "I don't want any of yer stupid excuses boys, I am payin' ya punks a grand a piece fer that mutant kid." McCartney pulled out a cheap cigar and lit it. "An' th' money those clowns from Genosha are willin' ta pay me fer little Demon Boy, I could buy a hundred of ya punks with just th' interest alone."
>
> "Why those guys from Genosha want mutant kids for anyway?"
>

> "If ya must know, they want th' kids before their powers manifest so they can control them and their powers. What th' Genoshians plans are I don't know or care." The man glared at the three. "I want th' kid and I want him now."

>

> "Why don't you get him yourself if you think it's so easy." Paul muttered under his breath.

>

> "What was that?" McCartney turned his fury on the teen. When the teen didn't answer, McCartney slapped him so hard he fell to the ground. Standing over Paul, the big man glared down at him. "Ya got something else ta say ta me, punk?"

>

> "Hey take it easy, man." Jarod helped his partner to his feet. "We're doing the best we can. The kid has people taking care of him now. And from the look of those purchases that lady was buying him, it must be some rich people."

>

> "I don't care if it's George Lucas takin' care of th' kid," McCartney pointed his finger at Jarod, making sure all three were listening to his every word. "If ya three do not have th' kid by th' next time we meet, I'm settin' up a deal with some people I know who would love ta have yer body organs." The three knew McCartney wasn't making a threat, he was making a promise. They had seen how he had dealt with former associates who hadn't lived up to his expectations. Most were never seen again and the others, the three knew what happened to them, they were better off dead.

>

> "Look, I give you my word Red Beard, that I personally will get Devil Boy myself." Jarod backed away from the angry man. "If I have to break into every house in New Orleans to find the mutant brat, I will."

>

> "Yer last chance, punk." McCartney continued to smoke his cigar while glaring at the three. "Those contacts fer th' boy will be here in two days and if I don't have him in my custody they will not give me a second chance and th' money is gone. If that happens, I will take it out of yer hides, get it!"

>

> "Yes, R.B." Wayne nodded quickly, following the other two boys out of the warehouse and into the cover of darkness.

>

> McCartney glanced over at the small pipe sticking out of the side of the warehouse. Walking over to it, he laughed. "Ya kids hear that? We gonna be sendin' ya off ta a new home soon enough."

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> Down below the warehouse, a hidden basement stood alone with a secret room a jointing to it. In it ten children, none over the age of fourteen were being kept against their will.

>

> The oldest, a boy tried opening the locked door but didn't have any success. Several of the others were crying for their parents. A small girl, holding her teddy bear came over to the boy. "That boy is still loose maybe he will get help."

>

> "Didn't you hear what they said up there?" The boy angrily kicked the door. "That kid has found somebody to look after him now, you must be dreaming if you think he's going to come back here and risk getting caught again."

>

> The little girl hugged her teddy bear close to her chest and leaned against the wall. "I'm hungry, Michael."

>

> "I know you are, Jenny, we all are." Michael walked over and held her. "McCartney won't feed us until that ship comes to get us and he said that's not guaranteed." Hearing several of the other children crying, he called out to them. "Do you want him to come down here again? You know what he did the last time he heard you crying. This time he might kill you with that belt."

>

> Michael's warning silenced several of the children with the exception of the very youngest, who was six years old. She continued to cry for her parents. Still wearing her long silk gown and holding a stuff animal, her purple hair covered her face as tears fell from her non pupil eyes. Her father, a well known movie actor, had offered millions for the safe return of his daughter.

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> Unlocking the front door, Tante allowed the boy to enter before she could lock the door back behind her once she got inside. She programmed the security system. "I'll put dese upstairs in your room, y' can entertain yourself until I finish." She started for the stairs, turned and gave him a stern look. "An' Chile, stay outta trouble."

>

> The boy managed to grin back at her and waited until she was gone before he moved to the stairs. He glanced upstairs, making sure Tante was in his room before he turned his attention to the locked door leading into Jean-Luc's private study. What was in that room he didn't know but he was determined to find out. He tried picking the lock, but after several attempts he gave up.

>

> He angrily kicked the door with his foot and then almost cried out in pain when the door won the fight. Hearing a key turning inside the front door, the boy ran into the living room, jumped on the couch and grabbed a magazine and pretended to be reading it. The door opened, he looked up with an innocent look and greeted the new comer. "'ello, Henri!"

>

> "'ello petite, y' here by y'self?" Henri asked, unlocking the study.

>

> "Non, Tante, she be upstairs puttin' dose clothes up she brought for me." The boy made a face. "Don' like goin' shoppin' wit' no woman." He complained, following Henri to the study. He stepped inside and stood in front of the desk, watching Henri going through the drawers. The boy snatched the letter opener off the top of the desk and stuffed it into his pant's pocket.

>

> "Didn' like goin' shoppin' when I was your age either." Henri shut the drawer after finding the papers he wanted. "C'mom, got t' lock de

study up." The boy followed behind Henri and just as the door was about to close, the boy slid the letter opener into the latch of the doorway frame to keep the lock from connecting to the door. Hearing a clicking sound, Henri turned the key. "Y' have fun an' I promise I take y' ridin' around in my new car when I get back home."

>

> "De red one?" The boy's face filled with excitement. He adored Henri's candy apple red trans-am. Henri nodded and the boy grinned proudly. "Oui, Henri, I be waitin'."

>

> Henri patted the boy on the head and rushed out the door. The boy watched from the drawn curtains as Henri drove the car out of the horseshoe driveway and disappeared from sight. He glanced quickly upstairs and ran to the study door. He was thankful Henri was in a hurry he never checked to see if the door was locked. Turning the knob, the boy found his little scheme had indeed worked. The door opened and the letter opener fell to the floor. Picking it up, the boy returned it back on the desk.

>

> Once inside the room, the boy was amazed at the room. There were no windows in the room, so it could not be viewed from the outside. The huge room was part library, with hundreds of books inside three huge bookshelves that reached the top of the ceiling. A tall metal ladder, on wheels was the only way to reach the top of the bookshelf, the other part of the room was part museum. A small display case caught the boy's attention.

>

> Walking over to the display case, he saw a dagger inside. The handle of the dagger was encased with a cross of jewels. A large red ruby was the center stone of the cross, another large red ruby was located at the bottom of the handle. The remaining stones formed the cross were emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. The blade itself was solid gold. The case, where the knife rested was layered with velvet and solid silver catch held the dagger in place.

>

> "Petite?"

>

> The boy jumped, startled by the voice that had taken him by surprise. He almost fell to the floor but he found himself grabbed before it could happen.

>

> "Didn' mean to scare y', boy." Jean-Luc held him tight, feeling him trembling in his arms. "Easy chile, it's only me."

>

> Regaining his composure, the boy angrily pulled out of Jean-Luc's arms. "Don' y' ever do dat again." He gave LeBeau the most evil look he could muster. "Don' like nobody sneakin' up on me."

>

> "I wasn' sneakin' up on y' petite," Jean-Luc held his hand out for the boy to take. Once the boy took it, he picked him up in his arms and walked out of the study and locked the door back. The man looked down at the boy, his own eyes a little on the angry side, "Y' de one who be sneakin' in a place y' have no business bein', no?"

>

> "But de door was open, " The boy strongly protested.

>

> "Henri must have left de door unlocked," He said, knowing the boy was lying. Henri would never leave the study door unlocked. He was too responsible to make a careless mistake like that. He carried the boy back to the big room and sat down with the boy on his lap.

>
> "M'sieu LeBeau?"
>
> "Oui petite!"
>
> "Dat dagger in dere," The boy pointed towards the study. "Where did y' get dat dagger? It's gotta be wort' a fortune."
>
> "Oui boy, it is."
>
> "Y' tell me 'bout it?"
>
> "Not'in' t' tell." Jean-Luc answered, hoping it would ease the boy's curiosity.
>
> "Please, tell me more 'bout it." The boy pleaded, making it clear he wanted to know everything. "Does dis have t' do wit' de guilds?"

>
> "Guilds? Y' been listenin' when we t'ink y' haven' been, right petite!" The man smiled slightly at the boy, who only nodded. "Dere are words dat are spoken in dis house dat are not for petites, like y'self t' hear, y' understand, boy?"
>
> "Oui," Stalling for a second, the boy got a worried look on his face. "Y' not mad at me for doin' dat, are y' M'sieu LeBeau?"
>
> "Non, I never heard of a boy who didn' get into some kind of mischief one time or anot'er." He pulled the boy into an embrace. "I'm a member of a guild dat y' heard us talkin' 'bout de other day. Many years ago, in order to prove myself worthy to b'long to dis guild, I had to do somethin' dat nobody else could do. De guild has a very dangerous enemy. Anyway to make a long story short, I stole dat dagger from dem to secure my place in de guild." He completed the story. "De dagger, L' Couteau Du Destin, belongs to de leader of my guild's enemy."
>
> "Y' just made dat up, huh M'sieu LeBeau!" He laughed. "Dat make a great bedtime story. Did y' tell it to Henri when he was younger?"
>
> "Y' remember boy, y' de one who asked 'bout de dagger." Jean-Luc told him. "It's up to y' if y' want to believe de story or not, petite."
>
> "If you two are finished talkin' about the past," Tante walked into the room. "I could use a little help gettin' supper ready." Jean-Luc allowed the boy to get down, and watched as Tante took his small hand into hers. "Jean, dis chile's a handful now, I don' need you puttin' anymore ideas in his head."
>
> The boy turned back to Jean-Luc, smiling a devilish grin at him. Jean-Luc winked back at him, pretending to keep it a secret from Tante.
>

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> <div class="center"><h3>CHAPTER SEVEN<h3>**
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>
> Later that afternoon with the house empty, the boy began his second run of exploring the large house. He started upstairs in Therese's bedroom, finding nothing exciting, he turned his attention to the huge bedroom that Henri occupied when he was home. Looking at several books on the bookshelf, he pulled one down and dropped down on the carpet to read it.
>
> "Hey, what y' doin' in 'ere?" Henri grabbed the book out of his hands and returned it back to the bookshelf. "I don' like people snoopin' into my affairs."
>
> "I wasn' snoopin', I was readin'!" The boy flashed another toothy grin. "Or can' y' tell de difference, an' b'sides, I wasn' doin' anythin' wrong."
>
> "Y' look like a stupid jackass when y' grin like dat." Henri glared at him. "Dat's how I know y' be lyin' through your teeth."
>
> "Don' have no idea what y' talkin' 'bout." The boy huffed.
>
> "Get up, we're goin' downstairs so I can keep my eye on y."
>
> "I ain' goin' anywhere." The boy glared up at him defiantly. He crossed his arms over his chest and dared Henri to do anything about it. "An' y' can' make me move."
>
> "Y' petite picouette!" Henri chuckled, walking over to the boy. "Y' comin' wit' me or must I carry you?"
>
> "Non!" The boy eyed Henri carefully, waiting for the man to make a move. When Henri reached down to grab him, he rolled away and drove under the bed. "betcha can' get me now.'">
> "Y' want to play games wit' me?" Henri knelt down, looked under the bed and located the boy. The boy knew his glowing eyes gave away his location but it didn't matter, he was having fun. "Jus' don' say y' weren't warned." The boy tried to move but Henri's lightning fast reflexes caught the boy off guard. He wasn't expecting the man to move so fast. Grabbing the boy by the arm, Henri yanked him out from under the bed. "Dat de best y' can do?" Henri taunted, holding the boy up in the air and laughed at him. "Therese can do better dan dis."
>
> "I wasn' ready." The boy protested, screaming insults after Henri threw him over his shoulder and then carried him down the stairs. "Dis not fair, Henri, I wasn' ready."
>
> "Y' de one who dared me to get y', did y' not?" Henri tossed the boy onto the couch, sitting down beside him before the boy could move. "Life isn't fair petite. Y' need to learn dat y' never lay all your cards on de table, never leave y'self out in de open without some sort of backup plan. Y' understand what I'm tellin' y?"
>
> "Oui!" The boy acknowledged, rolled over on his stomach and then tried to pounce on Henri. "Gotcha!"
>
> "Y' haven't been listenin' to a word I have been sayin'." Henri

yanked him over his lap and pinned him before the boy could even touch him. "Dere's a penalty for not listenin' an' y' are 'bout to find out what dat penalty is." He tossed the boy back down on the couch, face up and began to tickle him.

>

> "Stop, stop." The boy giggled uncontrollably. He tried squirming out of Henri's grasp but was unsuccessful. "Henri!" He managed to scream the man's name through his giggles. "I'll listen to y', I will."

>

> "Too late now." Henri continued to tickle him unmercifully. The boy was gasping for air by the time Henri released him. "Y' goin' to listen to me de next time I try to teach y' somethin'?" The boy nodded his head, breathing heavily as Henri wrapped his arm around the boy's head and pulled him back down into his lap. "I can teach y' a lot if y' be willin' to learn."

>

> The boy looked up, surprised by Henri's offer. Perhaps he finally had an opportunity to help those who needed him the most. "Henri, will y' teach me to pick locks?"

>

> "Oui, but why y' wanna learn to do dat?"

>

> "I jus' wanna learn in case somethin' comes up." The boy lied, hoping Henri believed him. "Me bein' on de streets y' never know when it's gonna come in handy."

>

> Henri eyed him suspiciously and then shook his head. "Alright, but under de condition dat y' listen to every thing I teach y'. Y' jus' once start goofin' off an' de deal is off, dat clear?"

>

> "Deal!" The boy offered his hand for Henri to shake, once he does, the boy changed the subject. "M'sieu LeBeau told me de story 'bout de dagger in his study. He say dat it comes from de guild's enemy, is dat true?"

>

> "PÃ're told y' 'bout de Guilds?" Henri asked in a shocked voice. The boy nodded his head. Henri sighed, adding, "PÃ're must have somethin' in store for y' if he told y' 'bout de Guilds." He paused, thinking for a second and tapping the boy's forehead, "Y' don't tell nobody 'bout dis, y' hear me?"

>

> "Henri, who'd believe me?" The boy asked, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm a mutie, nobody believes muties." He lowered his head. "Or wants one near dem."

>

> "Y' don't talk like dat." Henri lifted the boy's chin, forcing him to look into his eyes. "Y' be special to Tante, Therese, PÃ're an' me." He shook a finger in the boy's face. "Oui petite, y' can't tell me dat y' don't know I be speakin' de truth."

>

> "It don't matter, dere's been ot'ers who pretend dat dey care an' dey.." The boy's voice trailed off for a moment, remembering incidents from his past. He squeezed his eyes tight, shutting out the memories and then opened them to smile back at Henri. "Y' show me how t' pick locks now, huh?"

>

> Henri spent most of the night showing the boy how to open different locks. The boy asked especially for padlocks. He wanted to master those before any others. Henri didn't ask any questions, just showed

the boy how to master the basics. Finally around two in the morning, Henri called the lessons off. "Ok, enough for tonight. Y' ready for bed?"

>

> "Oui," The boy let out a fake yawn, went upstairs and turned out the lights in the guest bedroom. He waited until he was sure everyone had gone to bed before he felt safe enough to leave. He pushed the numbers on the pad to deactivate the security system. He had learned the combination from secretly watching Tante yesterday. Once he pushed the last number, he slipped out of the front door and took off in a dead run, completely unaware that someone was following him from the shadows.

>

> It took him three hours to reach the warehouse but the boy managed to get there without anyone noticing him, or so he thought. He quickly picked the lock on the entrance side door and sneaked in. He carefully made sure the warehouse was empty before going down to the lower floor.

>

> Freeing the lock on the door where the kidnapped children were, the boy opened the door. "C'mon, we gettin' out of 'ere."

>

> "I knew you would come back, I just knew it." Jenny ran over to the boy and gave him a hug.

>

> Michael gathered the children and hurried them out the door, he glanced down at the boy. "Thought you forgot about us, Shrimp."

>

> "Jus' cause y' t'ink I'm street trash don' mean I don' keep my word."

>

> "Look, I'm sorry I called you that." Michael said honestly. He took the lead, making sure everyone stayed together. He put his finger to his lips to silence the others, whispering to the boy, "Do you want to lead them outside or create a diversion?"

>

> "Diversion, I'm good at dat." The boy announced proudly.

>

> "Yeah, that I do know." Michael slightly opened the door to peak out. "Ok, the coast is clear. When this door opens, I want everyone to run to the door and don't stop for anything." He opened the door and waved everyone out. "Follow me." Michael shouted, running for the side door. He held it open, allowing the children run out of the warehouse and down the street.

>

> The children now free, stopped running. Michael made a quick head count and realized who was missing. "Where's the Shrimp?"

>

> "Dat's what I want t' know." A voice said from behind them. The children turned and saw thirty men dressed in black wearing black ski masks.

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>

> The boy ran for the side door, but the door was slammed shut before he could reach it. Three silhouette figures blocked his escape.

"Going somewhere, Devil Boy?" Jarod's voice echoed in the darkness.

"This time we ain't risking McCartney's wrath by letting you get away again." Jarod grabbed him and threw the boy down hard on the floor. "When you wake up you'll be in a whole new country. We don't want your kind here."

>

> The boy slowly got to his feet before he had time to think the two other boys grabbed his arms and shoved him in front of Jarod. The boy kicked out, striking Jarod in the groin. He managed to bite one of the boys holding him. With Wayne the only one holding him, the boy kicked him in the knee cap and ran for the door. He reached for the handle but never made it. He was yanked brutally around and a fist connected to his stomach. The force of the blow knocked him into a stack of wooden crates.

>

> "Ya see that ya punks?" McCartney stepped out of the shadows, the smoke from his cigar giving away his location. "He wasn't so hard ta catch, was he!" He grabbed the boy up by the hair and dragged him over to the three teens. The boy started coughing, desperately trying to catch his breath, tears were streaming down his face as McCartney jerked him harder by the hair.

>

> "Uh R.B.?" Wayne spoke up. "That little freak just let all those kids loose, you're holding the only one left."

>

> "WHAT!" McCartney screamed out his outrage. Glaring down at the boy, he yanked his head back causing the boy to cry out again. "Ya little devil, yer gonna pay for stealing money outta my pocket. He grabbed the boy up by the collar and shook him hard before he started choking the child. "Stinking mutant freak, yer parents shoulda drowned ya in the Mississippi River when ya were born."

>

> The boy glared, managing to muster enough strength to spit in McCartney's face.

>

> "Ahhhaarrggg," The man yelled, wiping the spit off his face as he held the boy in the other hand. "I'm though being nice to ya." McCartney pointed in the direction of a large cage sitting on top of a stack of pallets. He walked over and opened it.

>

> "What y' goin' t' do?" The boy's voice started trembling with fear.

>

> McCartney shoved the boy into the cage with enough force that the boy was thrown to the other side of the cage causing it to tip over. The cage fell to the floor and the boy's head struck the concrete floor knocking him unconscious. Blood trickled down the side of his face. "Get on the radio and contact the ship. Tell them I got the one he wanted but I want double for him or the deal's off."

>

> "What if they don't agree?" Jarod asked.

>

> "Ya stop asking too many stupid questions, boy and do as I told ya."

>

> Jarod climbed the stair to the office above. The young man was startled to see a man in black blocking his path. He pulled out a knife, trying to attack the intruder but lost his balance and fell down the stairs.

>

> McCartney heard the fall, turned in that direction and found

himself surrounded by ten men dressed as the one standing on the stairs looking down at him. "Who are ya guys?" Movement caught his eyes as another ten men completely surrounded the building from inside. He was becoming a little unnerved. "I'd ask ya before, who are ya guys?"

>

> A figure approached, supposedly the leader, "I wan' de boy."

>

> "Boy? what boy?" McCartney stared at the masked man. "Ya mean those two over there?" He pointed in the direction of the two punks. "Take 'em and get outta here. I gotta contact coming any minute."

>

> "I saw de boy come in 'ere." The man jammed his finger into the husky man's chest. "I'm not playin' games wit' y', de sight of y' makes me sick."

>

> "What ya want with th' boy anyway?"

>

> "None of yer business. Y' tell me where de Chile is or I got ways of gettin' de information outta ya." The leader moved closer, but another man whistled, getting his attention. "Watch 'em an' don' let 'em move." He ordered three of his companions. Walking over to where the man stood waiting on him, he glanced down, seeing the cage with the boy still inside. He reached down and gently pulled the boy out and cradled him in his arms.

>

> "Th' brat's worth a lot of money ta me and ya ain't about ta rob me of that money." McCartney yelled, ignoring the scene being played out before him. "He's mine and I ain't giving him up, ever." He quickly shut up when three of the men circled him.

>

> The leader held the unconscious boy in his arms was dumbfounded. He had to blink twice not believing what he had just heard. "Y' sellin' kids? What kinda monster are y'?"

>

> "They're only mutie brats, nobody wants their trash." McCartney stuck the cigar back in his mouth. "So I sell them ta some contacts that pays a lot of money and doesn't ask any questions."

>

> "How much y' want for dis one?" The leader asked, nodding at the small boy in his arms.

>

> "Ha ha ha," McCartney laughed. "Ya ain't got enough money ta buy that one, those people want him more than anything."

>

> The leader motioned with his head to the nearest man beside him, who tossed a black rectangular box at McCartney who caught it in the air. "Dat should be more dan plenty for me to buy dis petite's freedom."

>

> "We'll see about that, Mister." McCartney opened the box and stared at the object in the box. He pulled out the gold dagger and examined it. After studying the stones, he announced. "This thing's worth a fortune, ya got a deal and," He looked up to find the men had disappeared. "Hey, where did they go?"

>

> "They just disappeared like the wind." Jarod limped over to his boss, his two friends quickly behind him. "You want us to go find them?"

>

> "No," McCartney held the dagger up in the moonlight for the punks to see. "As long as I got this, who cares who they are. This thing's worth millions. C'mon lets get outta here." He took a few steps and then the door was kicked in. Thirty men dressed in black walked inside. "Hey ya guys back so soon, sorry ya ain't getting it back. A deal's a deal."

>

> A man emerged from the group, flipped on a flash light and shined it in McCartney's face. "Don' know what y' blabberin' 'bout, but y' got somethin' of mine dat was stolen thirty years ago." He ripped off his mask.

>

> "Do y' know who I am?"

>

> "Should I?" McCartney smirked.

>

> "Beaudreux!" The man eyed him and the punks. "and nobody steals from de house of Marius Beaudreux." He yanked the dagger out of McCartney's hand. " Dis dagger has been handed down from generation to generation. It's de single most important item dat my family has owned. It's sacred to me an' my guild." He waved over some of his men. "I received an anonymous call tellin' me dat de dagger was 'ere, I see dat de man wasn' lyin'." Marius took the black box from McCartney and placed the dagger back inside. "I swore an oath dat who ever was found wit' dis dagger in dere possession would pay de price wit' dere lives."

>

> "Look this is obviously a setup and I do not like ta be play fer a patsy." McCartney looked at the Assassin leader. "Let's join ta gather and find th' ones who did this."

>

> "Don' waste our time wit' dis trash, Father." One of the masked man spoke up. He pulled out a long sword and pointed it at McCartney's chest. "Y' stole de dagger an' now y' stand 'ere quiverin' like a yellow coward."

>

> "I'll handle dis, Julian. Y' step down." Marius ordered his son.

>

> The dock doors opened and a group of men stood ready with machine guns in hands. "I don't know what is going on and I don't care." One of the new strangers walked into the warehouse. Glancing around he spotted his contact. "McCartney, I want my cargo."

>

> "Dis is Assassin business, M'sieu." Julian glared at the strangers. "Y' best be gettin' back on dat ship of yours an' forgettin' what y' seen or y' be joinin' dem."

>

> "Don't threaten me, or I'll put enough bullet holes in you before you can swing that fancy sword or yours." The man yelled, unimpressed by the assassins. "McCartney, where are those kids?"

>

> "Gone!" McCartney smiled back at Marius. He knew his contacts were going to protect him and he turned his full fery on the Assassins. "Ya think ya could stick yer noses in our business and get away with it?" He turned back to the man. "That mutant brat ya wanted so bad freed all those kids."

>

> "You let a kid destroy my operation!" He turned back to his group. "Let's get out of here." They slammed the dock doors shut as McCartney screamed for him to come back. The boat's engine roared to

life and then left.

>

> "Y' were sayin'!" Marius raised his eyebrows.

>

> McCartney raised his hands to his chest. "Ya got yer toy back, just let me outta here and you will never hear from me again."

>

> Julian started laughing maniacally and then shoved his sword into McCartney's belly. Removing it out slowly, he wiped the blood off the weapon. He turned to the three punks. "Tie dem up, I got somethin' in store for dem." The three punks tried to run but were hopelessly outnumbered. Quickly tied and gagged, they tried to scream for help but their screams went unanswered.

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>

> Outside, the children were taken to the police station and their parents were called. Three other children, who are homeless stayed with their rescuers.

>

> Jean-Luc stood by himself, a worried look on his face as he continued to search for someone. Tante, who had insisted on coming, lifted a finger and pointed out into the darkness. "Jean, look, it's them."

>

> Twelve men come out of the darkness. The leader was still carrying the boy in his arms. He pulled his mask off. "PÃ're, dey hurt de petite. We better get him to de hospital."

>

> "I'll tend to dis chile, myself." Tante touched the boy's face. "No hospital is goin' to touch him as long as Tante can care for the boy."

>

> Jean-Luc pulled off his long coat and covered the boy with it. "Give de petite to me, Henri." Once he had the boy in his arms, the boy started stirring. Before he could speak to the boy, a loud explosion rocked the night sky. The warehouse was now in flames.

>

> "PÃ're, dat be Assassin work!" Henri whispered to his father. "Mebbe it best if we get outta 'ere b'fore de police show up an' start askin' a lot of questions."

>

> "Oui, Henri get de men outta 'ere an' meet back at de house as soon as y' can." Jean-Luc ordered his son. He addressed the remaining children. "We gonna find homes for y' children." Tante took the boy out of his arms before he had time to stop her. "Tante, y' turn thief now?"

>

> "We best be gettin' dis chile home." Tante rocked the boy in her arms, who opened his eyes slightly. He turned his head slightly in the direction of the burning warehouse and then closed his eyes to slip back into unconsciousness. "Y' goin' to be jus' fine, Chile. Tante is goin' to make you dat promise."

>

> The group walked down the street, got into several cars and drove off into the night as several fire engines and police cars speed passed them on the road.


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> <div class="center"><strong><h3>CHAPTER EIGHT<h3>**
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>
> Three days later, Tante heard a scream coming from the boy's room.
She rushed inside and found the boy screaming in his sleep. Sitting
down on the bed, she reached to touch him but his eye flew open. "Dey
comin', dey comin' for me."
>
> "Non Chile, you're safe now." Tante rocked him softly in her arms.
"It's over, dey'll never touch anyone ever again. Tante promises. Y'
goin' to be jus' fine."
>
> "Non, non," He shook his head, crying uncontrollably as if he were
still trapped in his nightmare. "Dey comin' back."
>
> "Chile, everythin' is goin' to be all right. Jean-Luc is goin' to
make sure no one hurts y' again." Tante rubbed his back, hoping the
gesture would console and stop the boy's trembling. "Has Tante ever
lied to y'?"
>
> The boy began to calmed down, his eyes getting heavier with each
note Tante hummed. The last thing he heard before sleep claimed him
was another tune Tante started humming.
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>
> Downstairs, Jean-Luc finished signing the last of several
documents, giving the papers to the man standing by his side. He was
a family friend and lawyer. "Everythin' is legal, Robert?"
>
> "Yes, signed, sealed and delivered." The man stacked the papers on
the desk to straighten them before placing them in his briefcase. He
reached for another legal document, giving it to Jean-Luc before
locking the briefcase. "And here's your copy."
>
> "How come dis didn' take long?" Henri asked the man, wondering how
everything could have been legalized without the family making an
appearance in court. "Usually dis can take years b'fore it is
finalized."
>
> "Normally adopting a child could take anywhere from two to seven
years, but," Robert explained, reaching for one of the four glasses
of wine Therese had carried in to celebrate, "the court saw this case
entirely different. One, the child is homeless. Two, he is a mutant,
and the court knows mutant children are very hard to adopt, almost
impossible if you ask me. Three, it didn't hurt your chances that you
had some inside help in this matter." He started laughing, "of course
that person should remain anonymous or he'd lose his license to
practice law, if you know what I mean."
>
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> "Robert, what ever do y' mean?" A sly grin played across Jean-Luc's lips. He picked up a glass of wine, took a sip and said. "De chile will never want for anythin' as long as I have somethin' to say 'bout it." He noticed Therese was smiling, something the young woman had been doing a lot lately. He knew the reason. "Y' seemed to like de idea as well, Filleuse."

>

> "It's going to be nice to have a little brother running around the house. I'm tired of being the baby of the family." She turned to Henri, wanting to know how he felt about the new addition to the household. "Right, Henri?"

>

> "Oui, but he's gonna be a handful." Henri took the last two wine glasses and gave her one of them. He held his goblet up in the air. "A toast, to de newest LeBeau." He wrapped his arm around Therese's waist. "Y' goin' to spoil him, I can see it now."

>

> "And you won't?" She countered.

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>

> A few hours later, the boy opened his eyes to see Jean-Luc and Tante sitting on each side of his bed. Therese rocked in the chair and Henri stood by her side. Jean-Luc placed his hand on the boy's forehead. "De fever has broken, how y' feel, Petite?"

>

> "My head hurts, M'sieu LeBeau." The boy answered softly. Tante pulled out a bottle of medicine and started shaking it. "Non Tante, not dat stuff again. It taste horrible. My head don' hurt dat bad."

>

> Tante measured the correct dosage, and lowered the spoon to his lips. "Open your mouth, Chile." Tante ordered, waiting for him to obey. He opened his mouth, knowing better not to argue when she meant business. After he swallowed, she gave him a glass of water. "Drink dis down and get dat terrible look off your face. It's not dat bad."

>

> "Y' don' have to take dis stuff for a week." The boy leaned back into the pillow, trying to drown out Henri laughing.

>

> "We came up 'ere to talk wit' y', Petite." Jean-Luc covered the boy back up with the sheets and blankets and swiped the boy's hair out of his eyes. "I would be honored if y' would be my chile, mon fils."

>

> "What?" The boy tried to get up, unsure he had heard the man's offer correctly. "Y' mean it?" He looked at Henri and Therese, who both nodded in agreement with their father. Tante gently forced him back down into the pillows.

>

> "I mean it." Jean-Luc answered him. "Dere's nothin' I want more dan to give y' my name. Y'll make me proud if y' accept my offer."

>

> "Oui," The boy flew into Jean-Luc's chest and started crying. "Didn' t'ink nobody loved me, never thought anybody cared till y' came along. Merci, M'sieu LeBeau, merci."

>

> "Papa, Petite!" Jean-Luc corrected, holding his new son tight in his arms. "Y' call me, papa from dis day on."

>

> "What we goin' to call mon frere, PÃ"re?" Henri asked, walking over to the bed where his father continued to hold his new brother.

>

> "His name's Remy!" Tante spoke up, everyone turning to her after hearing the name. The boy gave her a confused look, she wiped his wet face with a tissue. "You talk in your sleep when you have a fever, Chile."

>

> The boy shook his head, "I don'â€|" He suddenly grinned, finally understanding what Tante was trying to say. She wanted to be the one to give him a first name. He said the name silently to himself. He realized he loved the name.

>

> "Den, Remy it is." Jean-Luc announced to everyone in the room.

"Remy LeBeau."

>

****The End****

* * *

> <div class="center">Read the sequel:<div>

****Growing Pains****

End
file.